DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 583 CS 005 430

AUTHOR Burke, Suzanne M.; And Others
TITLE The Influence of Black English on Diagnosis of Reading in Learning Disabled and Normal Readers.
INSTITUTION Illinois Univ., Chicago. Coll. of Education.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Dialects; Black Students; Elementary Education; *Error Analysis (Language); Language Usage; *Learning Disabilities; *Miscue Analysis; Oral Reading; *Reading Research; Reading Tests; Test Validity

ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine if the removal of black English dialect as oral reading errors would influence the scores obtained on three oral reading diagnostic tests: the Gray Oral Reading Test, the Gilmore Oral Reading Test, and the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales. In addition, the study investigated whether there were differences in the influence of black English miscues on the scores of learning disabled students compared with the scores of a normal group of elementary school students. The 40 children in the sample population (20 control children who were matched by age and sex with 20 children identified as learning disabled) were given all three tests. Each test was scored first using test manual criteria and then rescored using those criteria but eliminating dialect miscues from the error count. On all three tests, learning disabled children scored lower than did control children and, on all three tests, the effect of removing dialect miscues as errors caused an overall increase in reading scores. On the Gray and Spache tests, but not on the Gilmore test, control children benefitted more from the removal of dialect responses as errors than did the learning disabled. In addition, the results indicated that dialect had a greater impact on the scores of the Gilmore Test than it did on either of the other tests. (Author/FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED185543

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE INFLUENCE OF BLACK ENGLISH ON DIAGNOSIS OF READING IN LEARNING DISABLED AND NORMAL READERS*

Suzanne M. Burke
Susanna W. Pflaum
June D. Knafle

University of Illinois at Chicago Circle

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Suzanne M. Burke
Susanna W. Pflaum
June D. Knafle
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Boston, 1980.

* Research supported by Chicago Institute for Learning Disabilities, University of Illinois Chicago Circle, H.E.W., B.E.H., 300-770-493.

CHILD
Chicago Institute for Learning Disabilities
College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO CIRCLE
BOX 4348, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60680

CS005430

The Influence of Black English On Diagnosis of Reading In Learning Disabled And Normal Readers

Of practical importance to diagnosis and instruction in oral reading is the question of the influence of Black English dialect on the assessment of reading proficiency. The scoring of dialect-influenced responses has serious implications for the classroom teacher and the clinician who may be unaware that dialect may be a factor in their evaluations of children's oral reading.

When a word that is read orally differs from the word written by the author, the result is considered an oral reading error. However, there is disagreement on what constitutes a genuine oral reading error. On three widely used reading tests, the Gray Oral Reading Test (1967), the Gilmore Oral Reading Test (Gilmore & Gilmore, 1968), and the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales (Spache, 1972), agreement is found for five types of errors: aid, omission, insertion, substitution, and repetition. However, dialect-related "errors" are categorized differently according to the individual test definition of an oral reading error. Dialect-related deviations from text that are due to phonological and to syntactic features of the dialect are included as errors in the scoring of the Gray and the Gilmore tests; however, only dialect-related deviations that come from syntactic features are considered errors in the Spache test. For example, phonologically based deviations, such as dat for that, are scored as partial mispronunciations on the Gray, and as mispronunciations on the Gilmore test. In keeping with the scoring criteria of the Spache test, such a pronunciation would not be scored as an error on that test.

In terms of the validity of counting dialect influenced deviations as errors, Harris and Smith (1976) stated that "regarding these mispronunciations as reading errors is indefensible" (p. 119), a view shared by Weber (1968).

According to Harris and Smith (1976), only a deviation which "interferes with the message or indicates an inability to attack an unknown word should be counted as a genuine error" (p. 118). Furthermore, many educators (Jensen, 1976; Pflaum, 1978; Rouch, 1976; Weber, 1973) point out that differences between Black English and Standard English exist, but "the tests fail to distinguish clearly between a reading error and an error that is simply not acceptable in standard speech" (Weber, 1968, p. 104). In fact, some have suggested that Black English speaking children are not necessarily harmed by using their dialect features during oral reading, but instead are harmed by teacher hyper-correction of dialect-related deviations which involve no loss of meaning (Cowart & Rystrom, 1972; Buck & Goodman, 1973; Labov, 1972; Pflaum, 1978).

Hunt (1974-75) analyzed oral reading errors made by 65 inner-city third and fourth graders on the Gray Oral Reading Test. The test was scored first according to the test manual instructions which included dialect miscues as errors and then rescored not counting dialect miscues as oral reading errors. She found a significant difference ($p < .001$) in scores when the effect of dialect was removed. Furthermore, she found that the removal of dialect as an error was significant ($p < .01$) for girls and for better readers ($p < .001$), but no group differences were found between third and fourth graders. She attributed 46% of the errors made on the Gray Test to dialect and concluded that to not count dialect influenced miscues as errors was the only reasonable way to assess a child's reading ability on this test.

Moreover, research evidence suggests that learning disabled children and poor readers may be further disadvantaged during oral reading diagnosis. Older learning disabled children and poor readers use linguistic cues ineffectively in self-correction, and depend more on phonic cues when reading orally

(Kendall & Hood 1977;Pflaum & Bryan, in press; Sturdivant-Odwarka. 1977). Since diagnosis for special service support involves poor and disabled readers' oral reading assessment, it is particularly important to investigate this issue in regard to this group of children.

The present study, in addition to replicating the Hunt (1974-75) study, extends the research to include two other oral reading tests. One purpose of the study was to determine if the removal of pronunciations and other text deviations that result from the features of Black English dialect as oral reading errors would influence the scores obtained on norm-referenced oral reading diagnostic tests (Gray Oral Reading Test, Gilmore Oral Reading Test, Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales). Another purpose was to find if there were differences in the influence of Black English miscues on the scores of learning disabled students compared with the scores of a normal group of elementary school students.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of black elementary school subjects who were selected from four low socio-economic, inner-city Chicago schools. Two of the authors, after having spent many hours in these schools observing the children in their classrooms and in individual interviews, concluded that all the participants used some features of Black English in their speech.

Twenty children, 10 males and 10 females, identified as learning disabled (LD) by the schools were matched with 20 control children who were randomly selected among a sample population whose age and sex were similar to those LD children already identified by the schools. A *t* test between the difference in reading scores on the 1978 Iowa Test of Basic Skills obtained by the LD and the control children revealed that the control children were significantly

better readers than the LD children (t (23) = 7.44, $p < .01$). The subjects ranged in age from 10 to 12, with a mean age of 11.1.

Procedure

Each subject was individually tested on all three tests on one day with the order of tests randomly assigned. The subjects were told to first read some stories orally and to answer specific comprehension questions about each story. The children then read passages from the Gray and Gilmore Oral Reading Tests and Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales while the experimenter recorded the oral reading behavior on a separate protocol. The taped session was later used to check for accuracy in the recording of oral reading behavior and to score the reading rate section of each passage.

Scoring

All tests were scored with two scoring criteria, one using the test manual directions and the other using those directions but with the removal of all "errors" which were miscues containing Black English features. To remove the Black English miscues in a standard fashion, a guide was developed based on Labov (1969) and Hunt (1974-75). This guide identified 16 common Black English features. For each participant there were six grade level scores, two obtained from each test, one that was derived by using the test manual scoring criteria and one that was derived by using those criteria but eliminating from the error count any dialect miscues.

Results

Two anovas were computed on the scores from each of the three oral reading tests. The first anova determined if there were group and sex differences in the scorings and if there were group by sex interactions. The second anova

determined if there were differences in the two scorings (the one using strict adherance to the test manual criteria and the other using those criteria but eliminating any dialect miscues as errors) and if there were interactions of scorings by group and by sex.

For the Gray Oral Reading Test, there was a significant main effect for group (F (1,36) = 33.81, $p < .001$), but none for sex nor any interaction of group and sex. The results of the second, more interesting computation, included a main effect for the two scorings (F (1,36) = 126.29, $p < .001$) and a scorings-by-group interaction (F (1,36) = 7.49, $p < .01$), but no other interaction. The data in Table 1 indicate that, as expected, the learning disabled children scored lower on the test. The impact of the dialect-miscue removal from the scores was to raise the reading scores slightly more than a half year grade equivalent, a notable increase, instructionally speaking. The interaction of scorings-by-group is demonstrated in the difference score means and standard deviations. Because the difference scores were much higher for the normal readers than for the learning disabled on this test, the effect of dialect miscue removal was greater for the control children. Thus, the effect of

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

removing dialect miscues as errors caused an overall increase in reading scores, an increase, however, that was greater for the control children than the learning disabled.

The Gilmore test also showed a significantly higher score, overall, for the control than the learning disabled, as one might expect (F (1,36) = 61.69,

$p < .001$); there were no sex main effects or interactions with group. From the second anova which tested differences in scoring procedures, there was a strong effect caused by the removal of dialect miscues as errors (F (1,36) = 83.33, $p < .001$), but, in contrast with the Gray test, there was no interaction of scorings-by-group. In this case, the learning disabled were clearly poorer readers, but they, like the control readers, were equally and adversely affected by strict adherance to the criteria scoring which included dialect responses as errors. The data on Table 1 indicate that for both groups of children, the effect of removing dialect miscues as errors raised reading scores nearly a year grade equivalent.

For the Spache Test, again, learning disabled were found to be poorer readers (F (1,36) = 42.07, $p < .001$). Again, too, the effect of removing dialect miscues as errors caused a significant increase in reading level scores (F (1,36) = 253.11, $p < .001$). In addition, there was a significant interaction of scorings-by-group (F (1,36) = 19.93, $p < .001$) and one of scorings-by-sex (F (1,36) = 4.73, $p < .05$). Thus, when such miscues were removed from consideration as errors, reading level scores were raised. Furthermore, according to the interaction of scorings-by-group, as seen in Table 1, the effect of such adjustment was greater for the control readers than for the learning disabled. Finally, the scorings-by-sex interaction, when analyzed, indicated that girls were more adversely affected by considering dialect miscues as errors than boys (Girls, $\bar{X}$ = .79, SD = .28; Boys, $\bar{X}$ = .60, SD = .38).

In summary, on all three tests, learning disabled children scored lower than control children, a not particularly surprising finding. In all three tests, too, the effect of removing dialect miscues as errors caused an overall increase in reading scores. In the Gray and Spache tests, control children benefitted more from the removal of dialect responses as errors than the learning

disabled did; in these two tests the difference scores (differences between test manual criteria and dialect removed scores) were correlated with reading achievement (as measured on the Iowa Test) ($r = .33$, $r = .40$, $p < .05$). On the Gilmore test, the scores of the learning disabled and control children were not differentially affected by the removal of dialect miscues as errors. Finally, girls benefitted more than boys on the Spache test only.

As a final note, although it was not a purpose of the study, the data do indicate that these tests vary considerably in the scores they provide; as much as a year grade equivalent difference resulted between the Gray and the Spache tests, overall. Furthermore, the mean overall difference scores between the two scorings in the three tests indicate that, in general, dialect has a greater impact on the scores of the Gilmore than it does on the other two tests.

Discussion

Not only did the study replicate the findings from Hunt (1974-75) that the effect of removing dialect-related miscues from the error count in the Gray Oral Reading Test caused a significant increase in reading scores, but it demonstrated that this conclusion may be generalized to two other commonly used tests, the Spache and the Gilmore tests. It appears that, if clinicians consider dialect-related miscues as errors while evaluating a child's oral reading, they will be likely to be seriously underestimating that child's reading proficiency.

It might seem that the simplest solution to this problem is to have the manuals of these and other tests include in their directions that dialect-related miscues are not errors, as the Spache test does in regard to phonological features. However, given the finding from Cunningham (1977) that teachers tend to be unaware of the specific features of Black English, it would seem that such directions would be only the first step needed for more objective diagnosis of

the reading of Black English speaking children. Further, it would seem that teacher training institutions need to include in their programs explicit instruction on the features of Black English and how those features are manifested in oral reading behaviors. The fact that scoring differences were found on the Spache test, as well as on the Gray and Gilmore, shows the importance of dialect-related miscues which are not merely pronunciation variations. Dialect differences in such instances as verb tense, number, and possessive markers need to be understood by teachers and clinicians.

In regard to the group differences and interactions found in this study, the learning disabled, although surely lower in reading, were less adversely affected by the procedure of counting their dialect-related miscues as errors than were normal readers (in two of the three tests). We do not think that it is correct to conclude from this finding that the problem is not one of importance in the diagnosis of the learning disabled. Since there were positive correlations between the difference scores and reading achievement, it seems that better readers' scores rise more when dialect miscues are not counted as errors. Similarly, Buck and Goodman (1973) stated that greater numbers of pronunciations with Black English features occurred with better readers. Therefore, the interactions of scorings-by-group in two of the tests is probably the result of difference in reading achievement generally. Because even the lower difference scores found with the learning disabled children still represent a relatively notable change in reading level scores, it is important for this factor to be considered in evaluating the oral reading of Black English speakers whatever their achievement.

REFERENCES

Buck, C., & Goodman, K. Dialect barriers to reading comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 1973, 27, 6-12.

Cowart, H., & Rystrom, R. Black reading errors or white teacher biases? Journal of Reading, 1972, 15, 273-276.

Cunningham, P.M. Teacher's correction responses to Black dialect miscues which are non-meaning changing. Reading Research Quarterly, 1977, 12, 637-674.

Gilmore, J.V., & Gilmore, E. Gilmore Oral Reading Test. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.

Gray, W.S. Gray Oral Reading Test. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967.

Harris, L.A., & Smith, C.B. Reading instruction: diagnostic teaching in the classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976.

Hunt, B.C. Black dialect and third and fourth graders' performance on the Gray Oral Reading Test. Reading Research Quarterly. 1974-75, 10, 103-123.

Jensen, L.J. Dialect. In P. David Allen (Ed.), Findings of research in miscue analyses: classroom implications. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1976.

Kendall, J.R., & Hood, J. Oral reading analysis of children with comprehension or word recognition disabilities. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, 1977. (ERIC No. Ed 136 316).

Labov, W. Some sources of reading problems for Negro speakers of NNE. In J.C. Baratz & R.W. Shuy (Eds.), Teaching Black children to read. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969.

Labov, W. Language in the inner city: studies in the Black English Vernacular. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.

Pflaum, S.W. Minority student language and reading acquisition. In S.W. Pflaum-Connor (Ed.), Aspects of reading education. Berkeley, Calif.: McMutchan, 1978.

Pflaum, S.W., & Bryan, T. Oral reading in the learning disabled. Journal of Educational Research, in press.

Rouch, P.D. Testing. In P. David Allen (Ed.), Findings of research in miscue analysis: classroom implications. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1976.

Spache, G.D. Diagnostic Reading Scales (Rev. ed.). Monterey, Calif.: McGraw-Hill, 1972.

References (continued)

Sturdivant-Odwarka, A. Oral reading characteristics associated with the language development of second grade children. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, 1977. (ERIC No. Ed 136 217).

Weber, R.M. The study of oral reading errors: a survey of the literature. Reading Research Quarterly, 1968, 4, 96-119.

Weber, R.M. Dialect differences in oral reading: an analysis of errors. In J.L. Laffey & R. Shuy (Eds.), Language differences: do they interfere? Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1973.

TABLE 1

Pupil Performance On Three Oral Reading Tests Using
Manual Criteria and Criteria for Removing Black English Features

		Grey			Gilmore			Spache		
		LD[a]	Control[a]	Overall	LD	Control	Overall	LD	Control	Overall
Manual Criteria	$\bar{X}$	2.01	3.97	2.99	2.28	4.73	3.50	3.16	4.81	3.98
	SD	.60	1.37	1.43	.81	1.17	1.59	.91	.76	1.18
BE Features Removed	$\bar{X}$	2.45	4.68	3.56	3.08	5.65	4.36	3.66	5.70	4.68
	SD	.88	1.50	1.66	1.23	.96	1.70	1.17	.83	1.44
Difference Scores	$\bar{X}$	.44	.72		.81	.93		.50	.89	
	SD	.36	.29		.59	.58		.32	.24	

[a] n = 20 in each group